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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: CLEANING HOUSE AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS

REF: ABUJA 708

Classified by Charge d'affaires Timothy D. Andrews for reason 1.5(d).

1. (C) Summary: The March 6 sacking of Police Inspector General Musiliu Smith and his seven Deputies (DIGs) sent a clear message of reform from the Presidency. Through his newly minted Police Service Commission, the President is also challenging the police old guard by reaching below the seven DIGs he dismissed to find the new IG - a decision based on merit rather than seniority - and bringing up a new batch of second-tier managers. This overdue move may presage much-needed reforms within the NPF. End Summary.

Out with the Old . . .

2. (C) During a rare March 6 meeting of the National Police Council (which last met in June 1999), President Obasanjo discussed the administration of the Police Force with the country's 36 governors and the group agreed on the dismissal of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Musiliu Smith for his mismanagement of the Force; he was present at the three-hour meeting and was fired at its conclusion. Smith reportedly was caught off-guard but cleared out his office within hours. Obasanjo announced his new appointment for the IGP position immediately after announcing Smith's dismissal.

3. (C) While adjourning for a private meeting with Police Service Commission Chairman Okeke, President Obasanjo asked Governors Makarfi (Kaduna) and Nnamani (Enugu) to represent the Police Council in breaking the news to the media waiting outside. Speaking extemporaneously, Makarfi declared that "in carrying out the planned reorganization and revamping (of the NPF) the government had considered it necessary to make fundamental changes in the administration of the police force." Makarfi also stated that the NPF had always been given all funding it had requested, even more than its budgetary requests. He noted that if the funding was not adequate, the managers of the NPF should have pressed for additional funding, which they did not do. (Comment: Many observers see Makarfi's comments as a hint at corruption among Smith and his Deputies - withholding federal funds designated for rank-and-file salaries and allowances. End Comment.)

. . . In with the New

4. (C) The new Inspector General, Tafa Balogun, was until March 6 the Assistant Inspector General for the Kano Zone - one of twelve police zones (each comprised of three states) in the country. By most accounts, he is a respected leader and is considered a reformer. According to the PSC Chairman, who has had several meetings with him already, Balogun is thoughtful, a "listener" and able to handle dissent. The seven new DIGs, including popular former Lagos Police Commissioner Mike Okiro, are cut of the same cloth. According to Okeke, these seven were picked by the PSC and approved by the President during the private meeting with Okeke after the National Police Council Meeting. These DIGs reflect the "federal character of Nigeria," with each of the six geo-political zones represented (one represented by two DIGs).

The new Agent of Change on the Block

5. (C) Behind the scenes of this major reshuffle is the new Police Service Commission (PSC). Enshrined in Nigeria's

constitution, the PSC has been moribund since 1989 but was re-inaugurated in November 2001, after passage of the Police Service Commission Act in June 2001. Comprised of seven members including a Chairman, the PSC is explicitly charged with sole authority for the appointment, promotion and discipline of all Police personnel except the Inspector General (who is appointed or dismissed by the President). The Commission must have representatives from key sectors of society: women; business, media, and human rights NGOs and must include retired senior judge and a retired senior police officer. The Chairman and Commission members are appointed by the President for a term of five years and can only be removed by a two thirds vote of the National Assembly.

16. (C) The members of the PSC appear eager to push the Commission's mandate for reform aggressively. In discussions with emboffs, Chairman Okeke and members Ayo Obe (head of Civil Liberties Organization) and Aisha Abdulquadri (lecturer at University of Abuja) have mapped out a rough plan to reform the behavior of the police and make them accountable to Nigeria society. Answering only to the President, the group can oversee the Inspector General in a way the Minister of Police Affairs cannot. According to Okeke, the President wants the new Commission to have real power as an agent of change and he has shown this trust by supporting Okeke's choices in firing Smith's Deputies and appointing new DIGs. Okeke and his fellow commissioners will next month be given their first budget with which they plan to build an agency with a staff of 300-400 in order to carry out its mandate adequately.

Precariously Perched: The Police Affairs Minister

17. (C) Bets are now on over how much longer Police Affairs Minister Steven Akiga - or his entire Ministry - will last. Akiga performed poorly in responding to January 31-February 1 police strike, showing little sensitivity to the real grievances of the striking rank- and-file and instead blasting them as "mutinous" and vowing to prosecute all who participated. He was further discredited when his belated pledge to release one billion naira to cover immediate salary and allowance arrears was not realized. According to some observers, Akiga feels threatened by the new PSC, which has well defined powers in contrast to his vaguely articulated mandate, which appears limited to some control over police budgets. He has tried to control the PSC through access to budgets and access to the President, but is losing. In a recent meeting with the President at which the PSC was discussing its start-up, the PSC Chairman noted that he had written the President a letter on an important matter. Akiga (also present) interjected that all PSC correspondence to the President should go through him. According to PSC members, the President scolded Akiga, "Shut up! He can write me directly." Chairman Okeke reportedly then offered Akiga a copy of the PSC Act so that he could determine the Commission's authority.

Talking Tough in Lagos

8.(SBU) Balogun made a symbolic March 10-11 pilgrimage to Lagos, the city whose name is synonymous with rampant crime. He visited various police formations, promoted eight policemen (among them a constable promoted to corporal, ostensibly for exhibiting courage in asking the new IG a question), and unveiled his agenda to reform the police and tackle insecurity. His pep talk -- widely reported in most Nigerian dailies -- included promises to review the condition and well-being of the force and to revise promotion guidelines. He also warned against corruption and exhorted the police to cultivate a more positive image in the eyes of a public long suspicious of their motives. He promised as well to pick up the pace in the investigation of the assassination of Attorney General Bola Ige.

9.(SBU) What made the headlines, however, was Balogun's tough talk on crime in Lagos. In blunt terms, Balogun ordered police to give armed robbers "fire for fire" when under attack. When facing armed criminals the new IG told police "not to waste time in firing back, don't wait for any order from anywhere." (Note: RSO/Lagos sources report not less than two dozen policemen -- and perhaps as many as 50 -- have been gunned down by armed gangs in Lagos over the last month. End Note) He also suggested the use of tear gas and other crowd control materials as deterrents to violence.

10.(SBU) We asked Civil Liberties Organization Executive Director Abdul Oroh for his interpretation of Balogun's forceful message on crime. Oroh believes Balogun's remarks were intended to boost the morale of the beleaguered Lagos

force. Balogun's "fight fire with fire" message was an emotional reaction to the recent spate of attacks by armed robbers and police on the Ikeja airport road between the domestic and international terminals, occurred March 10 only an hour after Balogun arrived in Lagos. According to one ConGen Lagos source, the gun battle ended when the police ran out of ammunition and fled. End Note.) But Oroh noted that such remarks, particularly if they do not represent a shift in policy, could send the wrong signal. Nigerian police are not properly trained, he stressed, and should not be given an implied green light to shoot suspected criminals with impunity. Oroh said that the human rights community will monitor such developments, though he was confident that the new police leadership and the PSC would institute many of the reforms needed to improve police performance and professionalism.

The Strike That Wasn't

11.(C) Comment: March 11 passed quietly throughout Nigeria despite earlier pledges by groups representing rank-and-file policemen to strike over continued salary and allowance arrearages. The sacking of IGP Smith and his Deputies appears to have been the major reason the crisis was averted, though continued discontent among the enlisted police staff will only dissipate when the billions of naira (tens of millions of dollars) are released to cover the arrears in wages and benefits. For now, the police are willing to trust the new IG to see this through.

12.(C) Comment Cont'd: Smith had clearly lost the President's confidence with his botched handling of the January 31 police strike. Under his three year tenure the police have continued to suffer from inadequate or irregular pay and poor discipline while reforms Smith promised in 1999 were never implemented. His departure and that of his Deputies - who many see as more responsible for the sad state of NPF affairs -- appears a victory for reformers in general and the Police Service Commission in particular. The Commission was already butting heads with a recalcitrant Smith who would not give up usurped powers to appoint and discipline subordinates. The new IG appears much more of a team player and more open-minded. The transition paints a much brighter future for INL's Police Reform project which will need strong advocates of reform within and outside the NPF. The PSC will likely become a major partner in this effort.

Andrews